

## III. TREND INFORMATION

### INTRODUCTION

An accurate prediction of North Carolina's future outdoor recreation needs is important in order to establish a positive and practical future direction for the state parks system. This chapter discusses demographic, socioeconomic, and other trends and how these trends may impact the state parks system. Anticipating change allows time to develop the means and methods to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

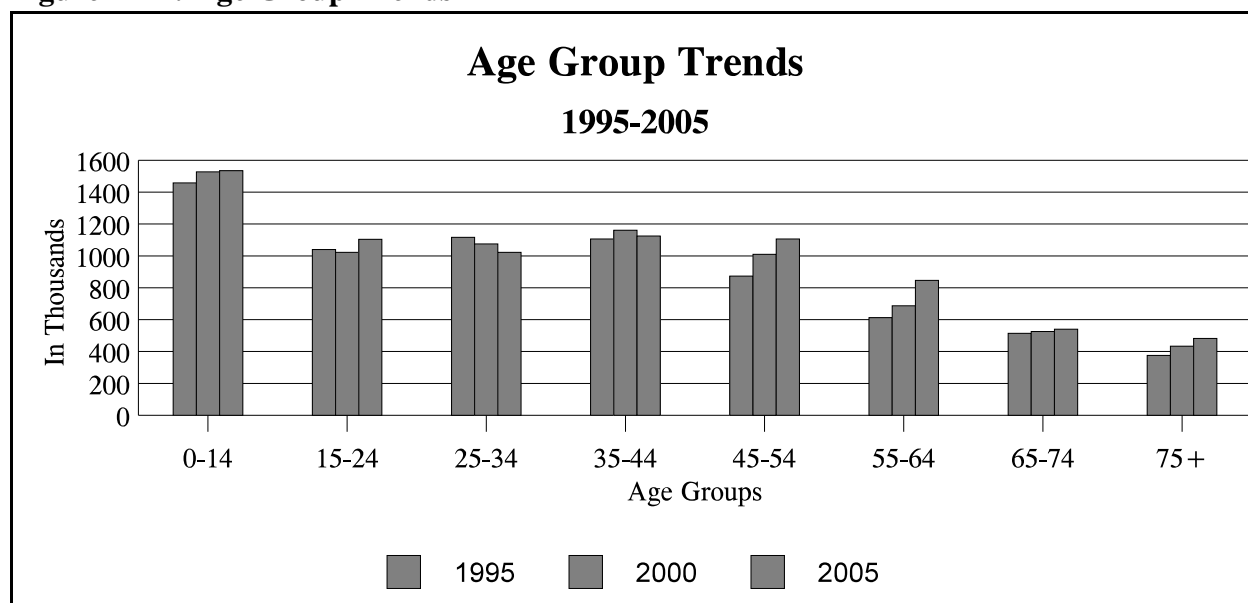
### DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The state's population grew 12.2 percent during the 1980's, from 5.88 million to 6.6 million, and should grow an additional 11.4 percent during the 1990's, to 7.39 million. Projections show that by 2004 the population will be 7.7 million, an increase of 4.2 percent from 1999.

The state's median age will steadily increase, from 33 years old in 1990 to 36 in 2000 and 37 in 2005. Those born between 1940 and 1959, and senior citizens above 75 years old, are the fastest growing age groups (Figure III-1).

As of 1990, more North Carolinians lived in urban areas than rural areas for the first time in the state's history.

**Figure III-1. Age Group Trends**



Populations are growing fastest in the Piedmont Crescent metropolitan areas (Triangle, Triad, and Charlotte) and in popular retirement areas such as the coastal counties and mountain urban centers.

The North Carolina Hispanic population increased by 95% from 1990 to 1997. While this population group (estimated at 350,000) is a small portion of the state's total (4.7%), it is growing far faster than the state population as a whole and the percentage will undoubtedly increase.

### **STATE PARK VISITOR INFORMATION**

In 1987 the U.S.D.A. Forest Service was contracted to conduct the Public Area Recreation Visitors Survey (PARVS) in the North Carolina state parks system. The PARVS study was a cooperative research project undertaken by six federal agencies and 11 state agencies. The primary objectives included obtaining visitor expenditure data and describing visitors and their preferences. Survey results identified visitor socio-economic characteristics, their on-site activities, travel preferences, and how visitor expenditures contribute to North Carolina's economy.

Why do people visit state park units? The convenient location was cited by 31 percent of the respondents; 25 percent thought other areas were too crowded; 21 percent liked the good facilities; 8 percent wanted to try a new area; 7 percent enjoyed the scenic beauty; and 6 percent came to see the attractions.

Travel preferences: Many park visitors (37 percent) come from within a 30-mile radius, while 17 percent come from 30 to 60 miles away. Park visitors indicated that the parks were their sole destination 86 percent of the time. While most visitors come from nearby, the average one-way distance traveled was 139 miles.

Most visitors return frequently: 78 % of those surveyed indicated that they were return visitors. The average number of return trips per year was six.

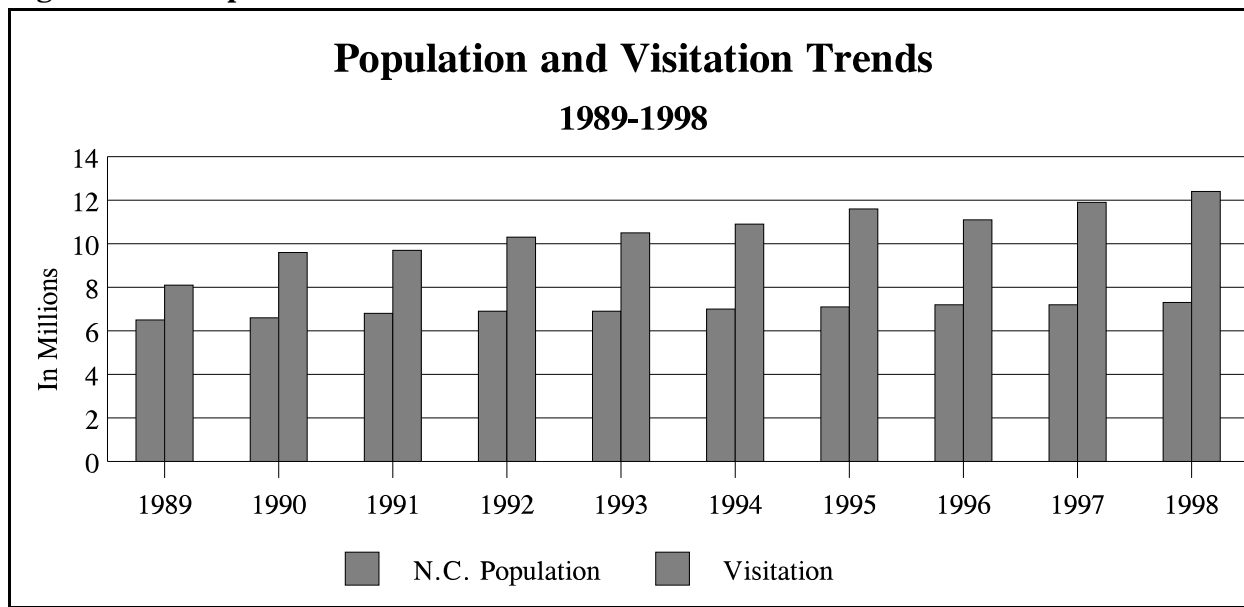
Families use state parks: 61 % of visitors statewide came with family members, 16 percent with friends, and 7 percent with family and friends. Ten percent of visitors came alone. Visitors also came in small numbers in organized groups and multiple family groups.

State park visitor spending: State park visitors spend an average of \$26.29 per person per 12 hours spent visiting in the parks on food, transportation, equipment, and lodging.

## RECREATION TRENDS

State park visitation continues to grow faster than North Carolina's population (Figure III-2).

**Figure III-2. Population and Visitation Trends**



Popular day-use facilities at parks in the Piedmont Crescent have experienced large increases in Hispanic visitors. Language barriers that sometimes exist for park managers have led to problems with visitor health and safety. Park rangers should meet this challenge with Spanish language training.

Extreme weather conditions have had a pronounced effect on park visitation over the past five years. Nine hurricanes from 1994-1999 have resulted in pre-emptive park closings; destruction of park facilities; park roads, rivers and trails obstructed by fallen trees; and flooding of park facilities. Heavy spring and summer rains closed camping and boating facilities at reservoirs in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1998. The blizzard of 1996 closed parts of 17 parks and the ice storm of 1994 closed one park for six months and another for three.

Severe weather has kept visitation from being higher, especially since many of the parks affected, such as Fort Macon State Park, Kerr Lake State Recreation Area, Falls Lake State Recreation Area, Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, Hanging Rock State Park, William B. Umstead State Park and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area are among the heaviest used areas. Barring a continuation of adverse weather trends, park visitations should show an upward trend that far exceeds the state population growth rate.

Older citizens take the longest trips in distance and duration. They prefer package tours and use hotels. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that persons 55 years and older spend a higher percentage of their total budget on vacations and pleasure trips than any other age group.

Use of mountain bicycles, personalized water craft, and all-terrain/off highway vehicles has increased dramatically in the state. Pressure to provide opportunities for use within state park units has increased.

The U. S. National Park Service has banned personalized water craft from its park units.

### **SOCIAL TRENDS**

Leisure time has become more limited. The average American worker currently puts in about 140 more hours on the job annually than 20 years ago, while paid vacation has fallen by 3.5 days (Recreation Executive Report, Jan. 1992).

The number of single-parent families and the number of two-parent families with both parents working are both increasing. These families tend to have less discretionary time than two-parent households with only one parent working.

### **ECONOMIC TRENDS**

Per capita income has increased from \$11,900 in 1985 to \$20,900 in 1995 with a projection of \$36,300 in 2005.

The state median family income increased from \$31,607 to \$35,601 between 1990 and 1996 (in constant 1996 dollars).

North Carolina is increasingly attractive as a place to live and work. Several national publications (*Fortune* and *Money* magazines) have rated Raleigh-Durham, Charlotte, Winston-Salem and several smaller cities among the best places to live and do business. The mountain cities of Hendersonville, Asheville and Brevard were among *Money* magazine's Top 10 Retirement Spots (1995). *Places Rated Almanac* - 6<sup>th</sup> Edition - 1999 rated the Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill metropolitan area as the sixth best place to live. *The Arts and Entertainment Network* in November 1999 picked Chapel Hill as their second best place to live.

Net migration—changes in population caused by people moving in or out of the state—will bring an estimated 706,630 people into North Carolina during the 1990's. Net migration will account for most of the 1,101,953 population growth projected for the state (N.C. Office of State Planning). Demographers note that the youngest and most educated people tend to move to attractive areas while the older and less-skilled stay put.

## **POLITICAL TRENDS**

The landscape continues to change rapidly as urban centers expand to encompass surrounding rural areas. Open space is rapidly yielding to this development trend. Vacation areas that were previously rural are turning into upscale communities. Watershed regulations spotlight the competing interests in environmental controls and additional development. Collectively, these growth-related pressures create a greater public awareness of natural resource protection needs. Conversely, they compete with future park expansion.

Federal funding for recreation may increase to significant levels. Several bills are being considered by the 1999 US Congress which seek to resume grants funding for states under the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program. This program was in decline for more than a decade before cessation of state side funding in fiscal year 1995.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS**

Increasing population and concomitant development pressures underscore the importance of developing interpretative centers and environmental education that will enhance an appreciation for the state's natural heritage and promote public health and an environmental ethic in all citizens. The Division will continue to expand interpretive & Environmental Education programs and facilities.

The growing elderly population has more leisure time but participates in active leisure activities less frequently than do younger age groups. Declining health is the most frequent reason cited for giving up an activity. The elderly are therefore more concerned with the safety, quality and accessibility of park facilities. Bus tours, which provide greater mobility and opportunities for socializing for the elderly, are becoming increasingly popular. State parks should be capable of accommodating bus tours and large school groups with adequate facilities and appropriate information and education programs. The ADA stipulates that both facilities and programs should be accessible to all visitors. Newly constructed park facilities will be accessible and older facilities renovated to meet ADA standards.

An increasing cosmopolitan and educated proportion of the North Carolina population participates in outdoor recreation more frequently, usually on weekends and close to home. This pattern creates a greater demand for higher quality outdoor recreation near population centers. The Division will expand existing parks where possible and seek to establish new parks to meet these future needs.

As two-wage-earner families become more common and urban lifestyles predominate, these families will have less time to plan outings. The Division will seek to provide better information systems about state parks that will help increase public awareness of recreational opportunities and reduce public frustration in using park resources.

State park visitation, particularly at parks near large urban areas, will continue to grow because of the trend toward frequent trips to nearby parks for one day or weekend visits.

Greater attendance at popular parks will mean an increase in wear and tear on facilities and in inappropriate behavior. Greater resources for visitor management will be required.

The state parks system should experience a continued demand for opportunities to visit large natural places where there is little evidence of other humans. These opportunities are threatened by greater visitation, encroaching development and environmental degradation.

Environmental lobbying will increase with increased public attention on problems such as air pollution, acid rain, changing climate patterns and accelerated development. These environmental problems do not have short-term solutions and will continue to generate public concern and support for government action. Donations and memberships in environmental organizations have been steadily increasing and expanding the base of support for action on environmental issues.

The elderly are potentially the most influential interest group of the 21st century. Their growing numbers, education, and organization, as well as their voting and spending power, will be dominant factors in public decisions. The expectations for park and recreation areas and facilities will be for improved quality, accessibility, and safety. Responding to these expectations and developing an elderly constituency will be advantageous.